

# Why Do You Call Me ‘Lord’?

Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-13, Luke 6:37-49 (ESV)

January 30, 2005

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” “Why do you call me ‘Lord’?” “Why do you call me?” The question that Jesus asks drives a wedge between stated faith and contradictory action. To acknowledge someone as Lord is to become that person’s servant. That is what Lord means. But to disobey that same one is to disavow him as Lord. That is what disobedience means. Where there is a discrepancy between faith and action, actions speak louder than words. This is not to say that Jesus seeks silence. This is not to say that Jesus does not want a profession of faith. But it is to say that Jesus seeks obedience and that he seeks congruence between faith in his Lordship and a life of obedience.

The good news behind today’s reading is that Jesus is Lord. Jesus is ruler of the universe. Jesus is the embodiment of God Almighty. Jesus is the presence of God with us. Apart from this truth and reality, this reading would make no sense at all. With this truth and reality, this reading is gospel, good news, life-changing proclamation.

One consequence of Jesus being Lord is that at least some people are able to acknowledge him as Lord. At least some people are able to believe in him. At least some people are able to call him Lord. This is as it should be. Christian faith is a real possibility and one to which we can aspire. Again, Jesus never says that he is not Lord. He never says that people should not call him Lord. He simply points out that those who do call him Lord should also obey him. That, after all, is what being Lord means.

This, of course, leads to a second consequence of Jesus being Lord. His questioning why people disobey indicates that obedience is at least possible. If obedience were not possible, the question would be nonsensical. But Jesus is not capricious. He does not ask of us that which is not possible. So his questioning of disobedience and the concomitant possibility of obedience indicate that the Christian life is also a real possibility and one to which we can aspire.

What, then, are we to do? How are we to seek Christian faith and life? “Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a

foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.” We are familiar with the contrast between the house built on the rock and the house built without a foundation. But consider what the man who built the house on the rock is meant to illustrate: “Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them.” Here is the model. Here is the pattern. Here is the invitation to Christian faith and life. “Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them” is like the man who built the house on the rock. Do you want to be like that man? “Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them” is a person of Christian faith and life. Is that of interest to you?

There are three steps to this invitation. First, “Everyone who comes to me.” Come to Jesus. Come to God. Come to church. Come to the preaching of the gospel. Come to where God has promised to meet us, promised to comfort us, and promised to make himself known. It is as Isaiah said, so many years ago: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.... “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” The door is open. The way is clear. Jesus invites us to come to him and so to come to God.

Second, “Everyone who comes to me and hears my words.” It is not enough to come to God. It is also necessary to hear the word of God. Without such hearing, there is no true coming to God. With such hearing, we have arrived in the presence of God. Again, as Isaiah said, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” It is through the word of God that God speaks to us. It is through the word of God that God communicates with us. It is through the word of God that God comforts us and challenges us. It is through the word of God that God gives his gospel to us. It is through the word of God that God pours out his grace upon us and gives us faith. Let us hear the word of God.

Third, "Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them." Again, it is not enough to come to God. It is not even enough to hear the word of God, if that hearing does not take root and lead to real change. This is the main point of today's reading. It is also necessary, in addition to coming to God, and in addition to hearing the word of God, to do the word of God, to obey what Jesus says. Without such obedience, there has been no hearing. With such obedience, there has been and is true and genuine hearing. "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

This obedience involves a departure from slavery in and to sin and a departure from the exile of alienation from God and from each other. This obedience constitutes a new exodus, a rescue into a new life, a salvation into a great joy. Again, as Isaiah said so long ago, "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." How could we not do this?

What will this new, Christian life look like? "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." Do you see how strange and wonderful this is? This world teaches us to live by taking. Christ teaches us to live by giving and forgiving. That is how to live. And that new, Christian life is no easy, human accomplishment. It is a gift from God.

This, then, is the pattern for Christian faith and life, for becoming Christian and being Christian: Come to Jesus, hear his words, and do them. Come to Jesus, hear his words, and do them. It is no accident that this threefold pattern of Christian faith and life is reflected in our threefold pattern of worship. First, we gather to glorify God. That is why we come here, to be in the presence of God.

Second, we hear the word of God. We hear the word of God both read and preached. This is what we do in worship. It is not that we just sit. We hear. We listen. We absorb. We receive. We believe. We obey. Hearing the word of God is the center of our service. Without hearing the word of God, there is no glorifying God and there is no giving thanks to God. But with the hearing, and on the basis of our hearing, we pledge our faith to God.

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Third, we give thanks to God. The grace of God elicits our gratitude and our graciousness. We express our gratitude in thanksgiving begun here and carried throughout our lives. We live out our graciousness in obedience begun here and carried throughout our lives. The very pattern of our worship intends to proclaim the gospel, to communicate the Christian faith, and to inculcate the Christian life.

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So let us be “like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.”

*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

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